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Internships: effective work integrated learning for law students

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Work experience which is integrated into an undergraduate law degree has a vital role to play in assisting law students to develop the skills and attributes they need in order to be effective legal practitioners. Work integrated learning provides a context for students to develop their skills, to see the link between theory and practice and supports students in making the transition from university to practice. The literature in Australian legal education has given little consideration to the design of legal internship subjects (as distinct from legal clinic programs). Accordingly, the design of internship subjects needs to be carefully considered to ensure alignment of learning objectives, learning tasks and assessment. This paper will examine the literature relating to internships, particularly in a legal context, and will propose some principles for the design of legal internships. These principles will be considered in light of an evaluation of a newly designed undergraduate legal internship subject. (*Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 2009, 10(3), 229-240).

KEYWORDS: Legal education; legal internships; work integrated learning.

Work integrated learning (WIL) has a significant role in preparing students for professional practice. While there is some debate about the role of university education, it is generally agreed that the basic function of a law school is to prepare students for the practice of law (Stuckey, 2007), and that legal education should focus on what lawyers need to be able to do rather than on what they need to know (Australian Law Reform Commission [ALRC], 2000). As a result WIL is increasingly important in undergraduate law programs. WIL assists in preparing students for legal practice by providing a context for them to develop their legal and personal skills and to see the link between theory and practice, and by supporting them in making the transition from university to practice (Shirley, Davies, Cockburn & Carver, 2006). Despite the importance of WIL in the undergraduate legal context, WIL subjects have not been widely available to Australian law students and have generally been limited to legal clinics which require intensive academic supervision, partnerships with community legal organizations and government funding (Giddings, 2003). This paper suggests that legal internships are an appropriate alternative WIL experience for law students and it will propose a cost effective model for the design of an internship subject which has the potential to allow all undergraduate law students to participate in WIL without requiring special funding. In Australia, there is little precedent for undergraduate legal internships, and less than half Australian law schools offer legal clinics (James, 2005). However, as Backman (2007-2008) points out there are a significant number of US law schools providing internship opportunities in the private sector and there is a growing body of literature in the US exploring relevant design issues. It is suggested that the experience in the US should inform the design of legal internships in Australia. This paper will firstly consider the importance of WIL for law students. Second it will review the literature relating to legal internships both in Australia and the US. Next; it will apply Biggs' alignment theory to the design of legal internships (Biggs, 2003) and finally, it will propose principles to be followed in the design of legal internships which are available to large numbers of students based on individually negotiated learning contracts. The principles will be tested in the context of a newly designed undergraduate legal internship unit.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF WIL FOR LAW STUDENTS

There is an emerging view from recent reports into legal education (Stuckey, 2007; Sullivan, 2007) that WIL has a vital role to play in legal education and particularly in preparing graduates for legal practice (Barton, McKellar & Maharg, 2007-2008). According to Stuckey (2007), the objectives of WIL are to help students adjust to their role as professionals, become better legal problem solvers, develop interpersonal and professional experience and learn how to learn from experience. James (2005) also argues that WIL has a crucial role in preparing students for the stresses of legal practice because it places a strong emphasis on reflection, which is a means of assisting students to develop their self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Given the growing emphasis on the importance of WIL in preparing law students for professional practice, the various models of WIL need be explored in the context of legal education. This is consistent with the findings of the recent Australian Learning and Teaching Council commissioned National Scoping study into WIL which reported a need for “collaborative and inclusive sector-wide engagement in initiatives that can support and sustain a broad range of WIL experiences” (Patrick et al., 2008, p. v).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Relevant to Legal Internships

There are various models of WIL adopted by law schools internationally. In the US, WIL courses are generally classified as simulation-based courses, in-house legal clinics, and internships (Stuckey, 2007). In the United Kingdom, WIL models include legal clinics and internships, as well as more creative initiatives such as soup kitchens, campaign teams and innocence projects (Kerrigan, 2007). WIL in Australian law schools has traditionally taken the form of clinical legal education programs in which students provide advice to real clients under the supervision of faculty or experienced legal practitioners. Clinical legal education programs have existed in Australia since 1975 (Giddings, 2003), and have become established in some Australian law schools (James, 2005). Australian clinical legal education programs have tended to follow a community service model (Giddings, 2003), and have emphasized social justice and ethical issues (Curran, Dickson & Noone, 2005), and personal development (James, 2005). There are significant impediments to enabling large numbers of students to undertake legal clinics because they require intensive academic supervision, partnerships with community legal organizations and government funding (Giddings, 2003). Giddings (2008) suggests that in order to meet the challenge of providing WIL opportunities, law schools should develop methodologies beyond the traditional legal clinic model to include simulations and internship arrangements. A legal internship is a WIL experience where students complete placements in legal offices or courts for university credit. Abeysekera (2006, p. 10) defines internships as “any carefully monitored work or service experience in which a student has intentional learning goals and reflects actively on what is being learned throughout the experience.” Internships are suitable in a legal context because they do not rely on cooperative arrangements between the university and workplaces which would be difficult to maintain in the legal profession (Stuckey, 2007), and they are appropriate in a program where many graduates will be employed in a commercial environment. Internships differ from legal clinics because the academic supervisor does not have control over the workplace environment in which the learning takes place. This lack of academic control leads to difficulty in designing a uniform learning agenda (Abeysekera, 2006).

United States Literature

Shift Towards Practical Legal Training: The lack of control over the workplace environment has led some commentators to question the academic integrity of internships, however, in the US there is a growing body of literature acknowledging that this type of legal work experience is educationally rich and it is not necessary for learning to take place that academics control or participate actively in the work experience (Conklin, 1996-1997; Givelber, Baker, McDivitt & Miliano, 1995; Stone & McLaren, 1999). To ensure that legal work experience does become an educationally rich experiential learning opportunity it is necessary that an appropriate academic framework be provided (Stuckey, 2007). The literature demonstrates that legal internships (referred to as externships in the US) are a valuable part of the US law school curriculum and the recent *Best Practices for Legal Education Report* (Stuckey 2007) included recommendations for the design and assessment of internship subjects. Recent changes to the American Bar Association (ABA) Standards for Approval of Law Schools requirements for internships have led to a transformation in the way programs are run, which has resulted in more widespread participation by students.

Until recently, the ABA required internships to include a classroom component, however, the recent changes to the requirements have allowed face to face teaching to be replaced by other means of guided reflection (American Bar Association Standard 305(e)(7)). As a result larger numbers of students are able to undertake internships; for example Gharakhanian (2007-2008) reports that 70% of graduates from Southwestern Law School have completed at least one internship during their degree. US law schools offering internships to significant numbers of students generally follow an apprenticeship model where primary responsibility for learning is placed on the student who creates a learning plan and submits a reflective journal, time logs, supervisor evaluations and work product (Backman, 2007-2008).

Apprenticeship Model: The key features of the apprenticeship model are: the workplace supervisor has the primary role in supervising the student and providing learning opportunities; work placements are widely dispersed in a variety of legal offices; the learning focus is on the work experience; academic supervision is by a range of assignments connected to the internship experience (such as reflective journals); academic/supervisor contact is usually by phone and written communication rather than site visits; a community service mission is not a requirement of the program; and an unlimited number of students may participate in internships because supervision is centered on the workplace supervisor (Backman, 2006).

One of the main benefits of the US apprenticeship model is that more students are able to participate not only as a result of minimal resourcing requirements but also because a wider range of placements can be approved (Backman, 2007-2008). For example, law schools may offer credit for placements in private legal offices, rather than merely in the Courts or non-profit organizations. This also means that students may choose placements more suited to their individual needs and interests and can explore career paths across the broad range of legal practice opportunities that are available (Backman, 2006). In the US, law schools may not offer credit for paid placements (American Bar Association Regulations, 2004) and there have been concerns raised in relation to unpaid placements in private organizations (Feeley, 2007-2008).

Feeley (2007-2008) reviews concerns with for-credit placements in private legal offices but concludes that such placements can be appropriate provided certain guidelines are followed.

The concerns that are relevant in the Australian context include the potential exploitation of students, lack of appropriate workplace supervision due to the pressures of time costing, the move away from the social justice goals of clinical legal education and practical considerations such as the difficulty in maintaining links with a large number of legal offices offering placements. The benefits of allowing placements in private legal offices include expanding the number and variety for placements available and involving members of the profession in law student training. Feeley (2007-2008) suggests the following guidelines be established for internship placements: criteria should be established for approving and evaluating placements; where placements are unpaid private legal offices should agree not to charge clients for students' work; strict guidelines for student work should be established to maintain academic rigor; students must have an academic supervisor; guidelines should be set for the workplace supervisor's academic and educational qualifications and supervision requirements; students must undertake legal work (rather than clerical work) in the placement and be offered appropriate supervision, learning opportunities and feedback; students should be provided with guidance so that their placement is a meaningful educational experience; and there should be a focus in class on social justice and ethical responsibilities.

In the apprenticeship model the student is primarily responsible for their own learning and the student's individual learning plan is usually emphasized (Backman, 2006). The student is in the best position to understand his or her own practice situation and therefore to establish the framework for learning (Walsh, 2007). A benefit of individually negotiated learning agreements is that they enable alignment of course objectives, teaching and assessment (Biggs, 2003). In practice, university subjects are required to have established learning objectives applicable to all students, and to meet this requirement in internships, learning objectives specifying appropriate levels of understanding should be established (Walsh, 2007) which students address through specific learning goals. The student's individual learning agreement should also specify how the student will attain the specific learning goals and include the work opportunities that will be provided by the workplace supervisor. In considering how the apprenticeship model can be implemented in an Australian context, it is useful to explore the principles of Biggs' (2003) alignment theory.

DESIGN OF LEGAL INTERNSHIPS – CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT

Alignment Theory

In *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, Biggs (2003) outlines his theory of *constructive alignment* in which learning objectives, teaching methods and assessment are aligned. Constructive alignment is student centered, so that "the students do the real work, the teacher simply acts as broker between the student and a learning environment that supports the appropriate learning activities" (Biggs, 2003, p. 27). Alignment theory suggests that the first step in designing a learning experience is to express the learning objectives by using verbs that reflect the desired cognitive level, the next is to design teaching/learning activities that are likely to encourage students to achieve the objectives and the last is to select assessment tasks that will establish whether and how well each student can meet the criteria expressed in the objectives.

Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for an internship subject should reflect the essential components of work place learning; critical reflection, capability (ability to perform in the workplace), the theory practice nexus, career planning and taking responsibility for one's own career, and, in the legal context in particular, professionalism (which encompasses ethics and social justice). The need to address issues of professionalism in the preparation of students for legal practice was clearly identified by the recent Carnegie Report into US legal education which declared that while Law Schools effectively provide for intellectual and cognitive apprenticeship, they fail to prepare students for their professional lives by not providing for practice-based learning and the development of professional identity and purpose (Sullivan, Colby, Wegner, Bond & Schulman 2007). WIL has a key role to play in redressing this failure to prepare students for professional practice.

Learning Activities

The learning activities should support students in developing their learning agreements, preparing for their placements and reflecting on their experiences. In developing learning agreements, students need assistance in evaluating what they bring to the placement and identifying what they wish to obtain from it, negotiating the result with the workplace supervisor, and undertaking self and career exploration (Abeysekera, 2008). In addition students need clear guidance as to what the learning expectations are and how to achieve them, and the distinction between work and what is learned at work (Walsh, 2007). Students should also be supported in preparing for the commencement of their internship which may be their first experience of a professional workplace. Young and Blanco (2007-2008) suggest students are often unprepared for the workplace in that they do not know how to dress and communicate appropriately; how to take instructions on legal assignments and they may be unfamiliar with the realities of the legal system. This lack of preparedness can inhibit students from attaining the most from their internship experience and may even embarrass the law school which has placed the student. Young and Blanco (2007-2008) suggest steps that should be taken to improve student preparedness including: a welcome memo from the supervisor stressing the importance of workplace attitude and etiquette; a checklist for students to use in taking instructions from their supervisor; and tips from previous internship students.

The student's learning experience will be primarily based on their own critical reflection (Walsh, 2007). Reflection is a key component of WIL; it is what turns experience into learning (Ledvinka, 2007). Students in legal internships reflect on their own performance and the performance of others, career goals and needs, the impact of legal processes and their understanding of the law (Katz, 1999). Reflective practice has an essential role in assisting students to make the transition to professional legal practice by equipping them with the skills they need to develop their professional identities and to manage their lifelong learning. Schön (1987) identified engagement in reflective practice as a means of developing emotional intelligence and preparing students for the stresses of professional practice. A reflective practitioner is more able to learn from experience, cope with uncertainty and anxiety, exercise sound judgment, assess his or her own skills and abilities, develop and implement career goals and plans, accept critical feedback and continue to improve skills and aptitudes.

To enable effective learning in WIL, students must be given explicit instruction on the benefits of reflective practice and how to think and write reflectively (McNamara & Field,

2007). Moon (1999) enunciates some fundamental principles of presentation of reflection to students including: students should be told what reflection is, why reflection is important in the particular learning context, and how reflection is different from more traditional types of learning; examples should be given of good and poor reflective writing, students should talk about what reflection is and should practice reflective writing so that feedback can be provided. Backman (2007-2008) suggests that students should be given guidance on their reflections either in the class room or by online methods such as discussion forums.

Stuckey (2007) suggests that providing prompt feedback to students is a key principle that should be met by legal internship programs. The students' reflective efforts should be affirmed, not only through engaging with the students' work, but also by the academic supervisor modeling reflective, analytical responses to that work. Feedback on reflection is a part of promoting a deep connection with the process for students and is critical to facilitating effective learning in workplace contexts.

Assessment

The assessment of student learning in WIL presents significant challenges and a detailed consideration of assessment is beyond the scope of this paper. However, some guidance is offered by alignment theory which suggests students should be assessed on the extent to which they have met the subject's learning objectives (Biggs, 2003); that is critical reflection, capability, the theory practice nexus, career planning, and professionalism. WIL subjects are generally assessed by reflective journals, portfolios, presentations and supervisor's evaluations and consideration needs to be given to appropriate criteria for these types of assessment. The involvement of workplace supervisors in assessment raises issues such as quality assurance and the reliability of the assessment which should be addressed in the overall design of the unit (Brodie & Irving, 2007).

PRINCIPLES FOR THE DESIGN OF LEGAL INTERNSHIPS

The foregoing consideration of the literature suggests the following principles should be followed in designing legal internships:

- There should be clear guidelines for approval of appropriate placements, including the nature of the work to be undertaken by the student and the qualifications of the workplace supervisor (Feeley, 2007-2008);
- Supervisors must be given guidance as to supervision requirements and, if relevant, what is expected of them in terms of assessment (Feeley, 2007-2008);
- Where the student is not paid, supervisors should be required not to charge clients for student work (Feeley, 2007-2008);
- The unit objectives should reflect the goals of the subject which are likely to include reflection, capability, the theory practice nexus, career planning and professionalism (Biggs, 2003; Sullivan, 2007);
- Students should enter into individually negotiated learning agreements in which their learning goals are established (Backman, 2006; Walsh, 2007);
- Academic learning support must be provided both in relation to the development of individual learning contracts, preparation for the placement, completion of the placement and reflection upon learning in the placement (Abeysekera, 2008);
- A flexible approach to teaching delivery should be adopted to enable students to participate regardless of where they are located and despite the fact they may be working full time. (Patrick et al., 2008);
- Reflection is a crucial component to student learning in WIL and should be integral to the teaching delivery and assessment (Backman, 2006; Katz, 1999; Ledvinka, 2007; Walsh, 2007);
- In the legal context, there should be a focus on ethics and professionalism in order to address the need to prepare students for the emotional dimensions of legal practice (Giddings, 2003; James 2005; Stuckey, 2007);
- Students should be provided with regular feedback on their learning in the placement (Stuckey, 2007); and
- Students should be assessed on the extent to which they have attained their learning goals (which should cover all the subject's learning objectives) and their ability to reflect upon their own learning (Biggs, 2003).

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLES IN AN EXEMPLAR UNIT

This paper will now consider how the principles which have been drawn from the literature can be applied in practice in the context of a subject in the QUT undergraduate law course, LWB421 *Learning in Professional Practice*, in which students organize their own placements in private legal offices. The placements were either voluntary or paid and in many cases were in offices where the student was already employed either as a secretary, research clerk or paralegal. The subject was offered in second and summer semesters 2008 with cohorts of 36 in each offering. A flexible approach to teaching delivery was adopted with activities taking place online via the unit Blackboard™ site (QUT's online learning management system). The assessment in semester two comprised a placement plan (10%), online discussion forum (30%) and student portfolio (60%). In summer the portfolio was weighted at 50% and the supervising lawyer's final report was weighted at 10%.

Feedback from students was obtained from 2 sources; a survey available to all students via the Blackboard™ site and the LEX survey (QUT's student evaluation tool which is also delivered online). The LEX survey was completed by 9 of the 36 students enrolled in the subject in semester 2, 2008 and by 5 of the 36 students enrolled in summer 2008. The LEX requires students to indicate their level of satisfaction with a number of items including assessment workload, assessment difficulty, relevance of assessment and subject online activities. The LEX also allows students to make qualitative comments on the subject. The Blackboard™ survey was a mixture of closed and open-ended questions. The Blackboard™ survey was responded to by 16 of the 36 students enrolled in the subject in semester two, and four of the 36 students enrolled in the subject in summer. Because of the limited number of responses to the surveys, the responses were merely treated as feedback which informed the unit coordinator's application of the principles in the unit. The application of each of the principles in the unit will now be considered in turn.

There Should be Clear Guidelines for Approval of Appropriate Placements, Including the Nature of the Work to be Undertaken by the Student and the Qualifications of the Workplace Supervisor

Student placements were required to be in a private legal office (such as a firm of solicitors or a legal division of a corporation); the student must have been performing legal work; and the student must have been supervised by a lawyer who held a current practicing certificate. The placement plan was to be approved by the unit coordinator before the student commenced the placement. Administrative processes need to be implanted at this stage to ensure supervisor's qualifications are checked in the placement approval process. The literature suggests that there is a benefit in placements being available in a wide range of legal offices which reflect the diverse career destinations of law students (Feeley, 2007-2008). In future, placements in any legal office including in the government and community sectors will be acceptable.

Supervisors Must be Given Guidance as to Supervision Requirements and, if Relevant, What is Expected of Them in Terms of Assessment

Supervisors were provided with information brochures which included information regarding the supervisor's obligations to the student and to QUT and the type of work to be undertaken during the placement. Templates for interim and final evaluation reports were also provided that were designed to enable an effective evaluation of the student without being overly demanding of the supervisor's time. In practice, the unit coordinator found it difficult to moderate the marks given by supervisors for the final report and there appeared to be

no common understanding amongst supervisors of the assessment requirements. In addition, student feedback suggested that supervisors be provided with more information about the importance of providing regular worthwhile feedback in relation to the student's strengths and weaknesses. Accordingly, detailed resources need to be provided to supervisors in relation to the requirements of supervision, provision of feedback and assessment.

Where the Student is not Paid, Supervisors Should be Required not to Charge Clients for Student Work

The charging for unpaid student work was not an issue that was raised with supervisors in 2008, and this will be addressed in future offerings.

The Unit Objectives Should Reflect the Goals of the Subject Which are Likely to Include Reflection, Capability, the Theory-Practice Nexus, Career Planning and Professionalism

The learning objectives for both offerings covered the theory-practice nexus, social and ethical issues, legal and personal skills, career planning and reflection.

Students Should Enter Into Individually-Negotiated Learning Agreements in Which Their Learning Goals are Established

The placement plan is an individually negotiated learning contract establishing learning goals for the placement which is negotiated between the student and the supervisor and approved by the academic. The learning goals are required to address the subject's learning objectives. The placement plan includes details of the placement, the timeline for completion of the placement including dates for the interim and final evaluations, a statement of the obligations of the student and supervisor, the student's learning goals and a statement of how the learning goals will be attained. Some students encountered difficulty in preparing the placement plan because of the timing of its submission (in week one), and because they did not know what they might expect from the placement prior to it commencing. This has been partially addressed by changing the due date for the placement plan to week four, and encouraging students to have earlier discussions with their supervisor in relation to their placement goals.

Academic Learning Support Must be Provided Both in Relation to the Development of Individual Learning Contracts, Preparation for the Placement, Completion of the Placement and Reflection Upon Learning in the Placement

Various readings were made available to students via the subject's Blackboard™ site. In preparing the placement plan, students completed a number of goal setting activities which were built around a legal skills audit; SOAR (strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results) analysis and mind mapping exercise. These activities were designed to assist students to set their individual learning goals. The students were provided with a template for the placement plan which included an example learning goal and statement as to how the goal would be attained.

In preparing for the placement, students were given a tip sheet and references to readings on first job survival and professional image. Students were also referred to a US podcast series,

*Transitioning from One-L to Summer Legal Work*¹ hosted by the Suffolk University Law School Legal Practice Skills Program, which is designed to assist students undertaking summer legal work for the first time. In the summer offering students were also required to complete an online preparation for work placement module.

Students were provided with a variety of readings in relation to their learning during the placement, which covered topics such as personality and learning styles, professionalism, ethics and obtaining the most from one's workplace supervisor. These readings were not compulsory, rather it was suggested that students read those that were applicable to their learning. The survey results indicate that different readings were useful to individual students, which tends to endorse the flexible approach. Most students found the podcasts useful and many also found the readings in relation to learning and personality styles valuable. For example, a semester two student commented:

I thought that the personality and learning style analysis materials were particularly helpful on reflective practice. I had not given a great deal of thought to why or how I do things, and once I had a chance to reflect on what my *personality* and learning styles were broken down, I was able to view myself in a different way. I have also incorporated some changes into the way I study as a direct result of having worked through this particular reflective exercise.

A Flexible Approach to Teaching Delivery Should be Adopted to Enable Students to Participate Regardless of Where They Are Located and Despite the Fact They May be Working Full Time

Face-to-face classes were not feasible for practical reasons including timing of placements and the participation of off-campus students, and accordingly a flexible approach was adopted. Various materials were provided on the Blackboard™ site and an online discussion forum facilitated the collaborative learning that would otherwise take place in classes. The topics discussed on the forum included preparation for placement, legal ethics and professionalism, career goals and planning, application of legal skills and knowledge in practice and personality and learning styles. The design and facilitation of a discussion forum raises particular issues which have been considered by the author elsewhere (McNamara & Brown, 2008).

The student comments indicate a high level of satisfaction with the flexible delivery:

The freedom to progress through the unit at your own pace and complete assessment items when it suited you. It was also good to communicate with other students by sharing and hearing other people's experiences in the work environment. (summer student)

Reflection is a Crucial Component to Student Learning in WIL and Should be Integral to the Teaching Delivery and Assessment

Reflective practice was pervasive in the teaching and assessment of the subject, with students engaging in a reflective process in writing their portfolios and practicing reflection collaboratively on the discussion forum. The unit Blackboard™ site included materials which explain the importance of reflective practice, how to engage in reflective practice and how to write reflectively and gave examples of reflective writing. Reflective writing is practiced by students at the beginning of semester by writing a short reflection on their expectations of the placement and on their interim evaluation (which is conducted with the workplace supervisor) and feedback is given on those pieces of reflective writing.

¹ The podcasts are available at <http://www.law.suffolk.edu/podcasts/lps-2008-summer.html> (Retrieved 1 May, 2009)

Students completing the Blackboard™ survey indicated the importance of self-reflection and self-awareness as an integral part of their learning. Of the 14 students across both cohorts who responded to the question: “Do you believe that thinking reflectively helped you to learn while undertaking your placement? How?”, 12 responded positively, one negatively, and one was unsure.

Thinking reflectively was the touchstone of the placement. It assisted me into gaining insight into how I was thinking and how my preconceived prejudices and thoughts were inhibiting progression. (second semester student)

The negative comment in relation to reflection was as follows:

The assessment program was somewhat repetitive - so much reflective writing, I felt like there was too much repetition.

Further consideration should be given to how internships can be assessed without over-reliance on reflective assessment.

In the Legal Context, There Should be a Focus on Ethics and Professionalism in Order to Address the Need to Prepare Students for the Emotional Dimensions of Legal Practice

Professionalism and legal ethics were specific topics on the discussion forum and students were required to complete readings on these topics and an interactive ethical scenario which was provided by the Queensland Legal Services Commission.² In the subject coordinator’s view, these topics resulted in the deepest level of critical reflection and discussion between students and they were also among the more popular with students. Five of the 16 students who responded to the semester two survey indicated that the ethics forum was one of the most valuable aspects of the course.

Students Should be Provided With Regular Feedback on Their Learning in the Placement

Feedback is an area in which the student feedback was less favorable. Some students indicated that it was difficult to obtain feedback from their workplace supervisor and others wished for more feedback from the subject coordinator in relation to their workplace activities, their reflection or their progress in assessment tasks. In the summer offering student contributions to the discussion forums were marked progressively in order to provide feedback in the form of summative assessment. In the next offering of LWB421, the summative assessment will also include a reflection on the student’s interim evaluation which will be weighted at 10%.

Students Should be Assessed on the Extent to Which They Have Attained Their Learning Goals and Their Ability to Reflect Upon Their Own Learning

The student portfolio required students to record attendance at the workplace and workplace activities and to reflect on the extent to which they have met their learning goals. Students also included examples of their work product in the portfolio as evidence of their learning. The supervising lawyer’s report also assessed students on the extent to which they had met their learning goals.

Overall Comments in Relation to the Law Internship

The qualitative comments indicate a high level of satisfaction with the nature of the subject. For example:

² The scenarios are available at http://www.lsc.qld.gov.au/250.htm#Ethical_scenarios (Retrieved 1 May, 2009).

This unit was the best thing to be introduced! It is fantastic for students already working to obtain credit for their work and assisted in enhancing their working situations. It has assisted with the transition from administrative tasks to 'professional' tasks. I definitely recommend the subject to all students.

The responses to the Blackboard™ survey also indicated students were generally satisfied with the design of the subject. For example, one student in semester two commented:

I liked being able to tailor my learning to the specific weaknesses that I identified by going through the course. I loved the flexibility of the course and found the online discussion forums very useful. All up it has been my favorite subject of my whole degree.

CONCLUSION

As universities respond to the call to offer more diverse WIL experiences, and law schools in particular seek to ensure that their graduates are prepared for professional practice, legal educators will need to explore models for implementing WIL that are resource effective and which are open to large numbers of students. It has been demonstrated that legal internships following the US apprenticeship model are an effective means of providing educationally sound WIL opportunities. This paper has suggested some principles for the design of cost-effective legal internships that aim to promote personal development and practical legal skills training by a process of reflection upon work place experience. The evaluation of the principles against an exemplar unit suggests that the implementation of the principles is feasible. The principles may also inform the development of internships in disciplines other than law.

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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative education (APJCE) arose from a desire to produce an international forum for discussion of cooperative education issues for practitioners in the Asia-Pacific region and is intended to provide a mechanism for the dissemination of research, best practice and innovation in work-integrated learning. The journal maintains close links to the biennial Asia-Pacific regional conferences conducted by the World Association for Cooperative Education. In recognition of international trends in information technology, APJCE is produced solely in electronic form. Published papers are available as PDF files from the website, and manuscript submission, reviewing and publication is electronically based.

Cooperative education in the journal is taken to be work-based learning in which the time spent in the workplace forms an integrated part of an academic program of study. Essentially, cooperative education is a partnership between education and work, in which enhancement of student learning is a key outcome. More specifically, cooperative education can be described as a strategy of applied learning which is a structured program, developed and supervised either by an educational institution in collaboration with an employer or industry grouping, or by an employer or industry grouping in collaboration with an educational institution. An essential feature is that relevant, productive work is conducted as an integral part of a student's regular program, and the final assessment contains a work-based component. Cooperative education programs are commonly highly structured and possess formal (academic and employer) supervision and assessment. The work is productive, in that the student undertakes meaningful work that has economic value or definable benefit to the employer. The work should have clear linkages with, or add to, the knowledge and skill base of the academic program.

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